

# Sai Baba of Shirdi

“Sai Nath” redirects here. For the university, see [Sai Nath University](#). For other uses, see [Sai \(disambiguation\)](#) and [Nath \(disambiguation\)](#). For other uses, see [Sai Baba](#).

**Sai Baba of Shirdi** (28 September 1835 – 15 October 1918; resided in [Shirdi](#)), also known as **Shirdi Sai Baba**, is an Indian spiritual master who is regarded by his devotees as a saint, *fakir*, and *satguru*, according to their individual proclivities and beliefs. He was revered by both his Hindu and Muslim devotees, and during, as well as after, his life it remained uncertain if he was a Hindu or a Muslim. This, however, was of no consequence to Sai Baba.<sup>[2]</sup> He stressed the importance of surrender to the true *Satguru* or *Murshid*, who, having gone the path to divine consciousness, will lead the disciple through the jungle of spiritual training.<sup>[3]</sup>

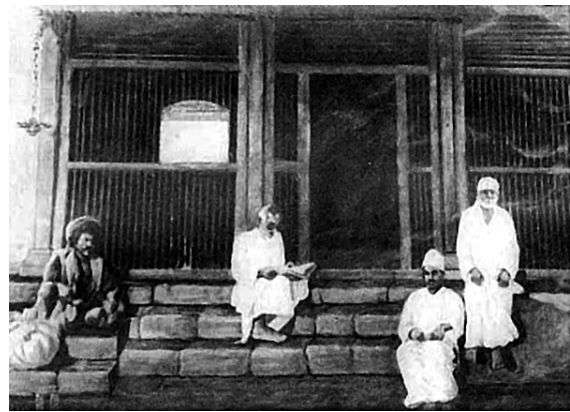
Sai Baba is worshipped by people around the world. He had no love for perishable things and his sole concern was self-realization. He taught a moral code of love, forgiveness, helping others, charity, contentment, inner peace, and devotion to God and guru. He gave no distinction based on religion or caste. Sai Baba's teaching combined elements of [Hinduism](#) and [Islam](#): he gave the Hindu name *Dwarakamayi* to the mosque in which he lived,<sup>[4]</sup> practised Muslim rituals, taught using words and figures that drew from both traditions, and was buried in [Shirdi](#). One of his well known epigrams, "*Sabka Malik Ek*" ("One God governs all"), is associated with [Hinduism](#), [Islam](#) and [Sufism](#). He also said, "*Trust in me and your prayer shall be answered*". He always uttered "*Allah Malik*" ("God is King").<sup>[3]</sup>

## 1 Background

Sai Baba's real name is Abdul Karim. When asked about his past, he often gave elusive responses. The name “Sai” was given to him upon his arrival at [Shirdi](#), a town in the west Indian state of [Maharashtra](#). Mahalsapati, a local temple priest, recognised him as a [Muslim](#) saint and greeted him with the words 'Ya Sai!', meaning 'Welcome Sai!'. *Sai* or *Sayi* is a [Persian](#) title given to [Sufi](#) saints, meaning 'poor one'<sup>[5]</sup> and in [Banjara](#) language, “sayi” means good one. The honorific “Baba” means “father; grandfather; old man; sir” in most Indian and Middle Eastern languages. Thus Sai Baba denotes “holy father”, “saintly father” or “poor old man”.<sup>[2]</sup> Alternatively, the [Sindhi](#) and [Urdu](#) word “sāī.n” (سائی), an honorific ti-

tle for a virtuoso, a saint, or a feudal lord (i.e. a patron), is derived from the [Persian](#) word “sāyeh”, which literally means “shadow” but figuratively refers to patronage or protection. The [Hindi-Urdu](#) word “sāyā” comes from the same borrowing. Thus, it could also mean “Master Father.” However, *Sāī* may also be an acronym of the [Sanskrit](#) term “Sakshat Eshwar”, a reference to God. *Sakshat* means “incarnate” and Eshwar means “God”. Some of Sai Baba's disciples became famous as spiritual figures and saints, such as Mahalsapati, a priest of the [Khandoba](#) temple in [Shirdi](#), and Upasni Maharaj. He was revered by other saints, such as Saint Bidkar Maharaj, Saint Gangagir, Saint Janakidas Maharaj, and Sati Godavari Mataji.<sup>[6][7]</sup> Sai Baba referred to several saints as 'my brothers', especially the disciples of [Swami Samartha of Akkalkot](#).<sup>[7]</sup>

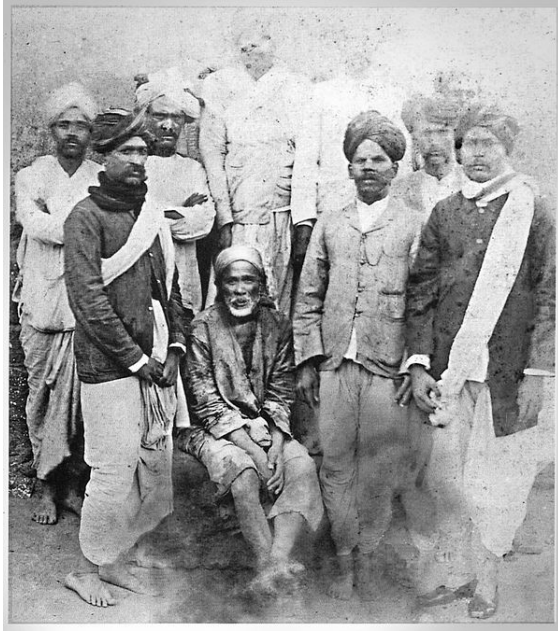
## 2 Early years



*Shirdi Sai Baba (right) and some of his devotees at Dwarakamai, his own Temple.*

According to the book *Sai Satcharita*, Sai Baba arrived at the village of [Shirdi](#) in the [Ahmednagar District](#) of [Maharashtra](#), [British India](#), when he was about 16 years old. He led an ascetic life, sitting motionless under a [neem](#) tree and [meditating](#) while sitting in an [asana](#). The *Shri Sai Satcharita* recounts the reaction of the villagers:

The people of the village were wonder-struck to see such a young lad practising hard penance, not minding heat or cold. By day he associated with no one, by night he was afraid of nobody.<sup>[8]</sup>



*Shirdi Sai Baba with some devotees*

His presence attracted the curiosity of the villagers, and he was regularly visited by the religiously inclined, including Mahalsapati, Appa Jogle and Kashinatha. Some considered him mad and threw stones at him.<sup>[9]</sup> Sai Baba left the village, and little is known about him after that.

There are some indications that he met with many saints and fakirs, and worked as a weaver. He claimed to have been with the army of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi during the Indian Rebellion of 1857.<sup>[10]</sup> It is generally accepted that Sai Baba stayed in Shirdi for three years, disappeared for a year, and returned permanently around 1858, which suggests a birth year of 1838.<sup>[11]</sup>

### 3 Return to Shirdi

In 1858 Sai Baba returned to Shirdi. Around this time he adopted his famous style of dress consisting of a knee-length one-piece Kafni robe and a cloth cap. Ramgir Bua, a devotee, testified that Sai Baba was dressed like an athlete and sported 'long hair flowing down to the end of his spine' when he arrived in Shirdi, and that he never had his head shaved. It was only after Baba forfeited a wrestling match with one Mohiddin Tamboli that he took up the kafni and cloth cap, articles of typical Sufi clothing.<sup>[12]</sup> This attire contributed to Baba's identification as a Muslim fakir and was a reason for initial indifference and hostility against him in a predominantly Hindu village.<sup>[13]</sup>

For four to five years Baba lived under a neem tree and often wandered for long periods in the jungle around Shirdi. His manner was said to be withdrawn and uncommunicative as he undertook long periods of meditation.<sup>[14]</sup> He was eventually persuaded to take up residence in an old and dilapidated mosque and lived a solitary life there, sur-

viving by begging for alms, and receiving itinerant Hindu or Muslim visitors. In the mosque he maintained a sacred fire which is referred to as a dhuni, from which he gave sacred ashes ('Udhi') to his guests before they left. The ash was believed to have healing and apotropaic powers. He performed the function of a local hakim and treated the sick by application of ashes. Sai Baba also delivered spiritual teachings to his visitors, recommending the reading of sacred Hindu texts along with the Qur'an. He insisted on the indispensability of the unbroken remembrance of God's name (dhikr, japa), and often expressed himself in a cryptic manner with the use of parables, symbols and allegories.<sup>[15]</sup>

After 1910 Sai Baba's fame began to spread in Mumbai. Numerous people started visiting him, because they regarded him as a saint with the power of performing miracles or even as an Avatar.<sup>[16]</sup> They built his first temple at Bhivpuri, Karjat.<sup>[17]</sup>

## 4 Teachings and practices



*Shirdi Sai Baba, leaning against the wall of his masjid, with devotees*

Sai Baba opposed all persecution based on religion or caste. He was an opponent of religious orthodoxy — Christian, Hindu and Muslim.<sup>[18]</sup>

Sai Baba encouraged his devotees to pray, chant God's name, and read holy scriptures. He told Muslims to study the Qur'an and Hindus to study texts such as the



Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita, and Yoga Vasistha.<sup>[19]</sup> He was impressed by the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita and encouraged people to follow it in their own lives.<sup>[20]</sup> He advised his devotees and followers to lead a moral life, help others, love every living being without any discrimination, and develop two important features of character: devotion to the Guru (*Sraddha*) and waiting cheerfully with patience and love (*Saburi*). He criticised atheism.<sup>[21]</sup>

In his teachings, Sai Baba emphasised the importance of performing one's duties without attachment to earthly matters and of being content regardless of the situation. In his personal practice, Sai Baba observed worship procedures belonging to Hinduism and Islam; he shunned any kind of regular rituals but allowed the practice of *namaz*, chanting of *Al-Fatiha*, and Qur'an readings at Muslim festival times.<sup>[22]</sup> Occasionally reciting the *Al-Fatiha*, Baba enjoyed listening to *mawlid* and *qawwali* accompanied with the *tabla* and *sarangi* twice daily.<sup>[23]</sup>

Sai Baba interpreted the religious texts of both Islam and Hinduism. He explained the meaning of the Hindu scriptures in the spirit of *Advaita Vedanta*. His philosophy also had numerous elements of *bhakti*. The three main Hindu spiritual paths — *Bhakti Yoga*, *Jnana Yoga*, and *Karma Yoga* — influenced his teachings.<sup>[1]</sup>

Sai Baba encouraged charity, and stressed the importance of sharing. He said: "Unless there is some relationship or connection, nobody goes anywhere. If any men or creatures come to you, do not discourteously drive them away, but receive them well and treat them with due respect. Shri Hari (God) will certainly be pleased if you give water to the thirsty, bread to the hungry, clothes to the naked, and your verandah to strangers for sitting and resting. If anybody wants any money from you and you are not inclined to give, do not give, but do not bark at him like a dog."<sup>[24]</sup>

## 5 Worship and devotees

Main article: Shirdi Sai Baba movement

The Shirdi Sai Baba movement began in the 19th century, while he was living in Shirdi. A local *Khandoba* priest, Mhalsapati Nagre, is believed to have been his first devotee. In the 19th century Sai Baba's followers were only a small group of Shirdi inhabitants and a few people from other parts of India.

Because of Sai Baba, Shirdi has become a place of importance and is counted among the major Hindu places of pilgrimage. The first Sai Baba temple is situated at *Bhivpuri*, *Karjat*. The Sai Baba Mandir in Shirdi is visited by around 20,000 pilgrims a day and during religious festivals this number can reach up to 100,000.<sup>[25]</sup> Shirdi Sai Baba is especially revered and worshiped in the states of *Maharashtra*, *Odisha*, *Andhra Pradesh*, *Karnataka*, *Tamil Nadu* and *Gujarat*. In August 2012, an unidentified devotee for the first time donated two costly diamonds valuing



*Naga Sai Mandir, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu*

Rs 11.8 million at the Shirdi temple, Saibaba trust officials revealed.<sup>[26]</sup>

The Shirdi Sai movement has spread to the *Caribbean* and to countries such as the *Nepal*, *Canada*, *United States*, *Australia*, *United Arab Emirates*, *Malaysia*, *United Kingdom*, *Germany*, *France* and *Singapore*.<sup>[27]</sup>

## 5.1 Notable disciples

Sai Baba left behind no spiritual heirs, appointed no disciples, and did not even provide formal initiation (*diksha*), despite requests. Some disciples of Sai Baba achieved fame as spiritual figures, such as *Upasni Maharaj* of *Sakori*. After Sai Baba died, his devotees offered the daily *Aarti* to *Upasni Maharaj* when he paid a visit to Shirdi, two times within 10 years.<sup>[28]</sup>

## 6 Claimed miracles

Sai Baba's disciples and devotees claim that he performed many miracles such as *bilocation*, *levitation*, *mindreading*, *materialisation*, *exorcisms*, making the river *Yamuna*, entering a state of *Samādhi* at will, lighting lamps with water, removing his limbs or intestines and sticking them back to his body (*khandana yoga*), curing the incurably sick, appearing beaten when another was beaten, preventing a mosque from falling down on people, and helping his devotees in a miraculous way. He also gave *Darshan* (vision) to people in the form of *Sri Rama*, *Krishna*, *Vithoba*, *Shiva* and many other gods depending on the faith of devotees.<sup>[29]</sup>

According to his followers he appeared to them in dreams and gave them advice. His devotees have documented many stories.<sup>[30]</sup>



*Sai Baba depicted on a tapestry*

## 7 In various religions

### 7.1 Hinduism

During Sai Baba's life, the Hindu saint Anandanath of Yewala declared Sai Baba a spiritual "diamond".<sup>[31]</sup> Another saint, Gangagir, called him a "jewel".<sup>[31]</sup> Sri Beedkar Maharaj greatly revered Sai Baba, and in 1873, when he met him he bestowed the title Jagad guru upon him.<sup>[32][33]</sup> Sai Baba was also greatly respected by Vasudevananda Saraswati (known as Tembye Swami).<sup>[34]</sup> He was also revered by a group of Shaivic yogis, to which he belonged, known as the *Nath-Panchayat*.<sup>[35]</sup>

According to B.V. Narasimhaswami, a posthumous follower who was widely praised as Sai Baba's "apostle", this attitude was prevalent up to 1954 even among some of his devotees in Shirdi.<sup>[36]</sup>

### 7.2 Zoroastrianism

Sai Baba is worshiped by prominent Zoroastrians such as Nanabhoy Palkhivala and Homi Bhabha, and has been cited as the Zoroastrians' most popular non-Zoroastrian religious figure.<sup>[37]</sup>

Meher Baba, who was born into a Zoroastrian family, met Sai Baba once, during World War I, in December 1915. Meher Baba was a youngster named Merwan She-

riar Irani, when he met Sai Baba for a few minutes during one of Sai Baba's processions in Shirdi. This event is considered as the most significant in Meher Baba's life. *Shri Sai Satcharita* (Sai Baba's life story), makes no mention of Meher Baba. But in *Lord Meher*, the life story of Meher Baba, there are numerous references to Sai Baba.<sup>[28]</sup>

Meher Baba credited his Avataric advent to Upasni, Sai Baba, and three other Perfect Masters: Hazrat Babajan, Hazrat Tajuddin Baba, and Narayan Maharaj. He declared Sai Baba to be a *Qutub-e-Irshad* (the highest of the five Qutubs, a "Master of the Universe" in the spiritual hierarchy).<sup>[38]</sup>

## 8 In culture

### 8.1 Sacred art and architecture

There are many Sai Baba temples in India.<sup>[39]</sup> There are also temples located in countries outside India, including in the United States, Netherlands, Kenya, Cuba, Canada, Pakistan, Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Japan.<sup>[40]</sup> In the mosque in Shirdi, in which Sai Baba lived, there is a life-size portrait of him by Shama Rao Jaykar, an artist from Mumbai. Numerous monuments and statues depicting Sai Baba, which serve a religious function, have been made. One of them, made of marble by a sculptor named Balaji Vasant Talim, is in the Samadhi Mandir in Shirdi where Sai Baba was buried.<sup>[41]</sup>

### 8.2 Film and television

Sai Baba has been the subject of several feature films in many languages produced by India's film industry.

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- [35] Ruhela *Sri Shirdi Sai Baba – the universal master* p. 27
- [36] Narasimhaswami, B.V. (1990). *Life of Sai Baba (Vol. 1)*. Madras: All-India Sai Samaj. p. 24.: "One very closely associated devotee of his, now living, still believes that Baba was 'only a Mohammadan.' What can 'only a Mohammadan' mean? It means that even after 25 years of personal experience of him and 36 years of his *post mortem* glories, the devotee treats him as a communalist just as he did when Baba was in the flesh." Narasimhaswami, B.V. (1990). *Life of Sai Baba (Vol. 1)*. Madras: All-India Sai Samaj. pp. 24–25.: "Baba wished to convince the devotee, if he was a Hindu, that he was Mahavishnu, Lakshminarayan, etc., and he bade water flow from his feet as Ganga issued from Mahavishnu's feet. The devotee saw it and praised him as 'Rama Vara', but as for the water coming from his feet, that devotee simply sprinkled a few drops on his head and would not drink it coming as it did from a Mohammadan's feet. So great was the prejudice of ages that even one, who thought of him as Vishnu, thought he was a 'Muslim Vishnu'. Prejudices die hard and the devotee wondered and wonders how people can believe that Baba was a Brahmin and that his parents were Brahmins when he had lived all his life in a mosque and when he was believed to be a Muslim."
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Librarian2, Nexxt 1, Hkansasra, Letterbug, DragonBot, Alexbot, Sauravvat, Raaj 3-enwiki, Arjayay, Dn9ahx, 7&6=thirteen, SchreiberBike, Saibharadwaja, ChrisHodgesUK, Apparition11, Rossen4, Cdkalyan, Saibaba4u, XLinkBot, Avoided, Saimaster, Pippa17, Good Olfactory, Addbot, Sharkysmachine, Grayfell, Bpvikas, Ingodwebelieve, Rmahesh01, GSMR, Fladrif, Ironholds, Moosehadley, Leszek Jańczuk, Prakash.bits, LaaknorBot, ShepBot, Favonian, Nizil Shah, Lightbot, OIEnglish, Sharnack, Shamak, Angrysockhop, Legobot, Luckas-bot, Yobot, Nriyothi, Pbtotgourou, Fraggel81, Lyricalgangsta77, Just-watch, Legobot II, Amirobot, Ravi35, Pipaaz, Letsgogreen, Cott12, AnomieBOT, Jim1138, Galoubet, JackieBot, Uenm, Satrugna02, Kaats123, Alangar, Materialscientist, Citation bot, Jelfitjsa, LilHelpa, Palfeb3 1987, LittleDoGooder, Chandmama, AguireTS, Shiriraju, Omnipaedista, Dorababu717, Nietzsche 2, Natural Cut, Harisk87, Kumar skr, Prajprashant, Shivhari, Dilpaswami, J929, Mitalohia, FrescoBot, Saibabasatsang, KrisTripathi, Usanmexico, Xophist, Lsharathkumar, D'ohBot, Endofskull, Naveenmadgula, DrRom, Redletternight, Amplitude101, Jyo143raj, I dream of horses, Trijnstel, AhamAtma, Blotowij, Dazedbythebell, Klacsanzky77, RedBot, Saiholdings, CitizenJordan, Logicframe, Vrenator, Jethwarp, TRYPPN, Simon Kidd, Shankarmetla, Reach Out to the Truth, TheMesquito, Onel5969, RjwilmsiBot, Ripchip Bot, EmausBot, John of Reading, WikitanvirBot, Shael11, Super48paul, Niru786, MarioFanNo1, GoingBatty, RenamedUser01302013, Wikiusertalk, Punkrawkcalf, Xerxes1492, Wikipelli, Sai.dumpu, Tatiraju.rishabh, Mz7, Sidhantrajam, Nikmek99, Kkm010, John Cline, Vensatry, Bollyjeff, Angpradesh, Milindc, Aeonx, H3llBot, Mjm295, Sheikhgulrez, Shaspor, Wayne Slam, Sainsf, Sumit2709, Rpaidd, Puneetkeswani, Sachinvennga, Donner60, Bill william compton, ChuispastonBot, Vivvt, Llightex, 28bot, ClueBot NG, Jack Greenmaven, Ziziphusjujuba, Harshstaker, MelbourneStar, Breck22, Dee71485, Sainath468, Rafikhsk, Widr, Antiqueight, 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K, D4iNa4, Natrajvenkatadri, Wayoyo, Doggiesyg, Larisawebb, Ashish1805, Liance, Qiblaye haqiqat, Danice thrall, Rj0274, Vivek Sarje, UNITEDTRAVELS, Joseph2302, Grosshigh, Human3015, Pandit sai, 2khan0, WikiBulova, Bondnarendran, Vesuvius Dogg, Ankush 89, Green1993, KasparBot, Alpeshvekaria, अजति एकनाथ देकळे, Diviniti.co.in, Arichuvadi, Smithzy, Vcky92, Sakshi.1607 and Anonymous: 885

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